



Cheeke, S. (2016). "Fantastic Modernism": Walter Pater, Botticelli and Simonetta. *Word and Image*, 32(2), 195-206.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02666286.2016.1149706>

Peer reviewed version

Link to published version (if available):
[10.1080/02666286.2016.1149706](https://doi.org/10.1080/02666286.2016.1149706)

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‘Fantastic Modernism’: Walter Pater, Botticelli and Simonetta’

‘in dreams of Art

And loftiest culture I would stand apart,
Neither for God, nor for his enemies’.

Oscar Wilde, ‘Theoretikos’⁽¹⁾

John Ruskin’s chapter on ‘Design in the Florentine Schools of Engraving’, delivered as a lecture in Oxford in 1872 and then collected in *Ariadne Florentina* (1873-6), presented a long note on Botticelli’s female figures, written by the Rev. Richard St. John Tyrwhitt. Tyrwhitt was an amateur watercolourist and writer on art, who had withdrawn his own candidature for the Slade Professorship of Art in 1869 in favour of Ruskin, for whom he acted as an occasional advisor and informal secretary.⁽²⁾ In the note, Tyrwhitt had suggested that ‘the same slender and long-throated model appears in Spring, the Aphrodite, Calumny, and other works’ by Botticelli (that is *La Primavera*, *The Birth of Venus* and *The Calumny of Apelles*).⁽³⁾ He ventured the opinion that the model had in fact been Simonetta Cattaneo Vespucci, the young wife of Marco Vespucci, and the lady whom Giuliano de’ Medici had chosen for his *dama* in the famous Florentine joust of 1475. That occasion, and Simonetta’s role in it, had been celebrated in Angelo Poliziano’s *Stanze per la Giostra*, completed after her premature death in 1476 at the age of twenty three. Botticelli had depicted Simonetta in the role and costume of Pallas for Giuliano’s standard, and in the many elegies and epigrams written to mark her death, among them poems by Lorenzo de’ Medici, Simonetta had been invested with a series of mythopoetic meanings, which, many now believe, Botticelli was drawing upon in his use of her (or of his memory of her) as his principal model in the secular or mythological paintings, *La Primavera* (in which she may appear as Flora) and *The Birth of Venus* (as Venus).⁽⁴⁾

Inspired by this idea of an actual person, the Rev. Tyrwhitt had permitted himself a fantasy:

“Now I think she must have been induced to let Sandro draw from her whole person undraped, more or less; and that he must have done so as such a man probably would, in strict

honour as to deed, word, and *definite* thought, but under occasional accesses of passion of which he said nothing, and which in all probability and by grace of God refined down to nil, or nearly so, as he got accustomed to look in honour at so beautiful a thing. (He may have left off the undraped after her death.) First, her figure is absolutely fine Gothic; I don't think any antique is so slender. Secondly, she has the sad, passionate, and exquisite Lombard mouth. Thirdly, her limbs shrink together, and she seems not quite to have "liked it," or been an accustomed model. Fourthly, there is tradition, giving her name to all those forms."⁽⁵⁾

Tyrwhitt went on to note that Simonetta's 'lover' Giuliano had been murdered in 1478, and that Savonarola, under whose influence Botticelli was said to have fallen in later years, had been hanged and burned in 1498. Had Simonetta's 'distress', Tyrwhitt anachronistically wondered, along with Savonarola's preaching, 'between them, taken, in a few years, all the carnality out of Sandro, supposing him to have come, already, by seventy-eight, to that state in which the sight of her delighted him, without provoking ulterior feelings?'⁽⁶⁾

Ruskin allowed Tyrwhitt's note to stand unchallenged, partly perhaps because he, too, had often meditated in a general way upon the 'ulterior feelings' to which his secretary alluded, and because he would certainly have approved the theological lesson Tyrwhitt attached to his speculation, in a discourse upon the meaning of Lust as the last sin of which we are to be purged in Dante's *Purgatorio*.⁽⁷⁾ It was Tyrwhitt, too, whom Ruskin had asked to look up the essay on Botticelli by 'an Oxford Man', which he had first read in *The Fortnightly Review* (1870), in preparation for his series of Oxford lectures in 1872.⁽⁸⁾ This was Pater's essay, 'A Fragment on Sandro Botticelli'. In a revised form the essay would become the chapter of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) described by an early reviewer as 'one of the most incongruous and grotesque misrepresentations ever invented by man'.⁽⁹⁾

Pater's essay had depicted Botticelli as a particular type of genius, a visionary artist whose work bears a personal mark of a peculiar kind:

Giotto, the tried companion of Dante, Masaccio, Ghirlandaio even, do but transcribe with more or less refining the outward image; they are dramatic, not visionary, painters; they are almost impassive spectators of the action before them. But the genius of which Botticelli is the type usurps the data before it as the exponents of ideas, moods, visions of its own; with this interest it plays fast and loose with those data, rejecting some and isolating others, and always combining them anew. To him, as to Dante, the scene, the colour, the outward image or gesture, comes with all its incisive and importunate reality; but awakes in him, moreover, by some subtle structure of his own, a mood which it awakes in no one else, of which it is the double or repetition, and which it clothes, that all may share it, with sensuous circumstance.⁽¹⁰⁾

Peculiar and personal to Pater too, because the passage itself doubles or repeats as an outline of Pater's own unhistorical method in *Studies*, playing fast and loose with the data, combining things anew, sometimes in anachronistic formulations. But it also describes a process often identified by Pater, in which the acutely personal dimension to an artist's vision, that which superficially seems least communicable to others, comes to be exteriorised and made into 'sensuous circumstance'. In a complex syntax, the 'reality' of various phenomena (colour, scene, gesture, image – each both a natural and a painterly/poetic term) awakes 'by some subtle structure of his own' (atomistic chemistry providing the metaphor) a wholly personal and intimate mood in the artist. Once awoken, the mood and reality are doubles and repetitions of each other; reality ('it') reacts with the mood, and the reaction turns the mood into a concrete representation of itself, to be shared by others.

John Addington Symonds' 1877 study of the Renaissance, which was frequently in an implicit dialogue with Pater, would rank Botticelli among those painters 'attractive by reason of their relation to the spirit of the age, and of the seal of *intimité* set upon their work'.⁽¹¹⁾ The statement recalled a sentence from Pater's chapter of *Studies* on Luca della Robbia, which defined the quality of *intimité* as that 'subtler sense of originality, the seal on a man's work of what is most inward and peculiar in his moods'. As such it is what we call 'expression, carried to its highest intensity of degree'. The

works of the artists of the fifteenth century, Pater argued, ‘possess this quality in an unmistakable degree’.⁽¹²⁾

‘Mood’ and ‘moods’ are vital words in the Pater lexicon, as they are more generally to the literature that comes immediately after Pater. Like impressions, gestures, moments, they denote those fugitive intensities of a new literary sensibility. ‘Mood’ is an especially fugitive category perhaps, resistant to definition by definition, which may be why, although clearly fundamental, it has rarely been theorised.⁽¹³⁾ As a phenomenon of affect, a mood seems in some sense to be pervasive – or ‘global’, as psychologists say (one finds oneself wholly inside a mood); it is an acutely interiorised form of consciousness. At the same time a mood is somehow also experienced as an exterior. Thus we may be able to think of it as a form of ‘expression’, as Pater claims; something to be communicated. The word ‘intimacy’ suggests this double aspect. Unlike an emotion, however, a mood seems less likely to have a particular referent, or to be directed at an object. Although Pater is suggesting that in Botticelli a mood may be awoken by an aspect of importunate reality, it seems to have no volitional or cognitive element as such. We may seek to regulate our moods, but we struggle to initiate them. They are unintended. Moreover, as an aesthetic *effect* a mood moves beyond its origins. Through this paradox of intimacy and detachment, and by making the motor of change in this sentence not Botticelli’s own agency, but ‘importunate reality’ in volatile combination with personality, Pater prepares the ground from which to advance his more daring argument.

The data with which Pater played fast and loose was not, in every case, wholly accurate to begin with. The central theme of the essay – heresy – is predicated upon a misattribution which had originated with Vasari. The picture of Botticelli’s supposed heresy, *The Assumption of the Virgin* (1475-77), which Pater had seen in London’s National Gallery, was not in fact by Botticelli, but, as is now generally accepted, by Francesco Botticini. It had been commissioned as an altarpiece by Matteo Palmieri, the author of a long poem in imitation of Dante, *La Città di Vita* (1465), and had, as Pater says, ‘the credit or discredit of attracting some shadow of ecclesiastical censure’.⁽¹⁴⁾ This was because the picture was supposed to illustrate Palmieri’s poetic idea that the third part of the angelic host who had chosen neutrality in the war in heaven (being ‘neither for God nor for his enemies’, as Pater puts

it), had been mercifully granted a second chance by being allowed to re-join the celestial hierarchy as human beings. Human souls, in other words, derived from those neutral angels. It was an idea that could be traced back to Origen in the third century, who had caused controversy by advancing the notion that the angels whose love for God during the course of eternity had diminished only moderately became human souls (whilst those whose love had worn off drastically, became demons).⁽¹⁵⁾ In the third canto of the *Inferno* Dante had written of ‘li angeli che non furon rebelli / ne fur fedeli a Dio, ma per se fuoro’ (the rebel angels who were not faithful to God but *who stood apart, or for themselves alone*). Just inside the gates of hell they mix with those human souls who lived ‘without disgrace and without praise’. Driven out of heaven lest they mar its beauty, the neutral angels will not be received into hell either, ‘lest the wicked have some glory over them’. The world ‘suffers no report of them to live’, and Virgil advises Dante not to talk of them, but merely to look and pass by.⁽¹⁶⁾

For Dante the decision to abstain from choice was, in effect, to make a choice for Lucifer, to turn away from God’s love, in a matter in which there could really be no neutrality. The human souls who, like the rebel angels, choose not to choose, are therefore neither fully alive nor wholly dead; they are ‘hateful to God and to His enemies’ (‘a Dio spiacenti ed a’ nemici sui’). The phrase is echoed and inverted by Pater (the original essay was softened just fractionally for Christian readers in the later revision of ‘God’ to ‘Jehovah’). The word Dante uses to describe what he takes to be a form of cowardice is ‘*viltà*’, which has the sense of ‘pusillanimity, littleness of soul, the meanness of nature by which a man refuses his calling and misses his mark’.⁽¹⁷⁾ T.S. Eliot would connect the same passage in Dante with the crowd of people coming over London Bridge in the ‘brown fog of a winter dawn’: ‘so many, / I had not thought death had undone so many’.⁽¹⁸⁾ For Eliot, the encounter with these neutral faces is also a reanimation of a sorrowfulness experienced before, already suffered by Dante. ‘So many’ is doubled because the experience comes with the burden of repetition. Yeats would later describe the existential crisis of a period in which ‘the best lack all conviction’.⁽¹⁹⁾ Much is at stake in these contrary readings of Dante. Clearly, the moral value of neutrality is something that must always be fought for and justified, in times of historical crisis especially so. Pater’s own life and work

have sometimes been taken to exemplify a low-key but heroic neutrality, a resistance to various forms of cultural authority.⁽²⁰⁾ Seen in this light he is, in effect, resetting the value of living ‘without disgrace and without praise’, and is urging us towards understanding the virtue of escaping the world’s report. ‘In an age when the lives of artists were full of adventure [Botticelli’s] life is almost colourless’, Pater wrote approvingly. ‘Only two things happened to him’ and there was ‘no legend to dissipate’.⁽²¹⁾ Versions of the same phrases may be found in biographies of Pater. (It is part of the in-woven autobiographical subtext of almost every chapter of *Studies*.) Certainly in 1870 Pater’s feelings about Christianity were distinctly ambivalent. ‘He was not all for Apollo, not all for Christ’, as Edmund Gosse put it.⁽²²⁾ Less sympathetically, Henry James accused Pater of wanting to ‘hunt with the Pagan hounds and run with the Christian hare, to *ménager la chèvre et le chou*’.⁽²³⁾ To have his cake and eat it, we might say. ‘So just what Dante scorns as unworthy alike of heaven and hell’, Pater wrote, ‘Botticelli accepts, that middle world in which men take no side in great conflicts, and decide no great causes, and make great refusals’.⁽²⁴⁾

Of the Palmieri heresy, Pater wrote:

True or false, the story interprets much of the peculiar sentiment with which [Botticelli] infuses his profane and sacred persons, comely, and in a certain sense like angels, but with a sense of displacement or loss about them – the wistfulness of exiles conscious of a passion and energy greater than any known issue of them explains, which runs through all his varied work with a sentiment of ineffable melancholy.⁽²⁵⁾

The key idea is that there is a current of unorthodoxy or heresy in Botticelli’s pictures, upon which the essay will expand later, which is posited upon the sentiment of ‘melancholy’.

Ineffable melancholy. Whether the sentiment had struck *quattrocento* observers of Botticelli’s pictures to the same degree as it did those of the nineteenth century – whether it struck them at all, in fact, – must remain essentially obscure to us. We cannot be certain that Pater’s observation is simply anachronistic in this sense, even if the attribution of its cause or motive may fall into that category (I’ll return to this point in a moment). The Virgin’s presentiment of future suffering is conventionally

illustrated in a drooping sadness or pensiveness. There is a strain of melancholy in all maternal love. Alexis-François Rio, the nineteenth-century writer on art who had done most to inspire devotion to the early Italian painters, and whose Catholicism was securely orthodox, had noted the particular melancholy of Botticelli's Madonnas in *De la Poésie Chrétienne* (1836), and in the later *De l'Art Chrétien* (1861-7) he had spoken again of 'cette invincible mélancolie'.⁽²⁶⁾ James Jackson Jarves's *Art Studies: the "Old Masters" of Italy; Painting* (1861) had observed a 'boding sadness from which not even his angels or his Venuses are exempt, and which is very noticeable in his Madonnas',⁽²⁷⁾ and Crowe and Cavalcaselle's *A History of Italian Painting* (1864), upon which Pater drew, wrote of a 'silent melancholy in the face of the mother of Christ'.⁽²⁸⁾

But Pater ascribed the melancholy to a different cause:

Perhaps you have sometimes wondered why those peevish-looking Madonnas, conformed to no acknowledged or obvious type of beauty, attract you more and more, and often come back to you when the Sistine Madonna and the virgins of Fra Angelico are forgotten. ... For with Botticelli she too, though she holds in her hands the "Desire of all nations," is one of those who are neither for God nor for his enemies; and the choice is on her face. The white light on it is cast up hard and cheerless from below, as when snow lies upon the ground, and the children look up with surprise at the strange whiteness of the ceiling. Her trouble is in the very caress of the mysterious child, whose gaze is always far from her, and who has already that sweet look of devotion which men have never been able altogether to love, and which still makes the born saint an object almost of suspicion to his earthly brethren. Once, indeed, he guides her hand to transcribe in a book the words of her exaltation, the *Ave*, and the *Magnificat*, and the *Gaude Maria*, and the young angels, glad to rouse her for a moment from her dejection, are eager to hold the inkhorn and support the book; but the pen almost drops from her hand, and the high cold words have no meaning for her, and her true children are those others, in the midst of whom, in her rude home, the intolerable honour came to her, with that look of wistful inquiry on their irregular faces which you see in startled animals – gipsy children, such as those who, in Apennine villages, still hold out their long brown arms to beg

of you, but on Sundays become *enfants du choeur*, with their thick black hair nicely combed and fair white linen on their sun-burnt throats.⁽²⁹⁾

Can Pater have been blind to his own misunderstanding of these paintings in terms of their historical and cultural co-ordinates? The misreading is so pronounced, so flagrant, and punctuated with statements of such incontrovertible untruth ('that sweet look of devotion which men have never been able altogether to love'), that we can only assume not. Partly, to be sure, it is a simple provocation, and as such it would prove to be successful. But might it also be working towards more subtle ends? What Pater is suggesting is that the 'type' of the Virgin is inhabited in Botticelli's work by a person resisting its limits by not conforming to type. He does so not by falsifying the expression on the Virgin's face (many testified to seeing melancholy there), but by attributing it to a different cause altogether: a rejection of Christianity – a shrinking from the role she is required to play in the Christian story. The strange digression about the Apennine children similarly traces an identity divided around the daily reality of begging, and the Sunday role as *enfants du choeur*, a role we sense the children inhabit automatically. Pater is not claiming that this effect is an intentional one, nor even that it is a precise index of Botticelli's aforementioned heresy; nor is he arguing that it is a reflection of late fifteenth-century Renaissance infidelity (of the kind Ruskin repeatedly lamented). He is imagining what it would be like to see in these faces both type and counter-type at once; and he is attributing the result to a particularly personal 'mood' or 'sentiment' in Botticelli. 'Mood' is a vital word for Pater because it allows him to sidestep the question of the artist's volition or intellect. The mood described here is not theological in that sense at all. And it awakens its double in the face of his model (whom the essay later names as Simonetta). Moods also take grammatical forms; in this case it is a dramatic and anachronistic *present*, which is not that of the *quattrocento*, nor that of the nineteenth century, but a daring meeting of the two. We might think of this as a particular aesthetic space made possible by *ekphrasis*, when the narrative stasis of a picture is opened up to a present tense of indeterminate place and time, an anachronic dimension, where the 'data' is freed, and where there are new combinations. The image of the children looking up in surprise at the 'strange whiteness of the ceiling' when the snow is on the ground is a metaphor for this effect. Forty years or so before

Pound's definition of an image as 'that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time', it is a striking example of *Imagisme*.⁽³⁰⁾ The whole passage, in fact, advances the kind of imaginative claim upon truth that we would happily accept in a prose poem, or in a conventional *ekphrasis*. If we ask, is the notion of a Madonna who is wearied by and alienated from her role, an intelligible one, then of course the answer is yes, but only under these very particular and perhaps extravagant conditions.

Pater would have known that his reading would lead to the accusation of anachronism. He seemed, in fact, to be deliberately courting this criticism, as if it is one of the effects aimed at in the essay. Margaret Oliphant obliged him in her contemporary review of *Studies* in *Blackwood's Magazine*, in which she berated 'that fantastic criticism' which took for its subject this 'simple-minded artist of an early age, on whom the questionings of a perturbed nineteenth century had certainly never dawned'. Pater's speculations, she argued, were 'the very madness of fantastic modernism trying to foist its own refinements into the primitive mind and age used to no such wire-drawing.' In other words, the argument had been strained to the point of falsification. What Pater had described as a sentiment of repulsion from Christianity had 'never entered into the most advanced imagination within two or three hundred years of Botticelli's time, and was as alien to the spirit of a medieval Italian, as it is perfectly consistent with that of a delicate Oxford don in the latter half of the nineteenth century.'⁽³¹⁾ Although no doubt revealing a certain naivety about the Age of Faith (not to mention the delicacy of Oxford dons), in a general sense Oliphant's objection was unanswerable, as Pater would have known. John Addington Symonds, too, thought that Pater had ascribed to the painter 'a far greater amount of sceptical self-consciousness than he was at all likely to have possessed'.⁽³²⁾ (In fact, the self-consciousness and scepticism is attributed not to Botticelli, but to his Madonnas, which, I would suggest, is a small but significant difference.) Symonds observed that the Madonnas actually conformed to a generic type, 'the note of a specific school, and not the deliberate invention of an antagonist of the most cherished Catholic tradition'.⁽³³⁾ When he returned to the subject in the third volume of his *Renaissance in Italy*, Symonds praised the *Madonna of the Magnificat* (Pater's focus), for a 'mystic calm and resignation' which had been 'so misplaced in his Aphrodites.' He meant in

terms of the appointed part the Virgin played in the pathos of the Christian narrative. He added a footnote:

I cannot bring myself to accept Mr. Pater's reading of the Madonna's expression. It seems to me that Botticelli meant to portray the mingled awe and tranquillity of a mortal mother chosen for the Son of God. He appears to have sometimes aimed at conveying more than painting can compass; and, since he had not Lionardo's genius, he gives sadness, mournfulness, or discontent, for some more subtle mood.⁽³⁴⁾

In a well-known essay on Botticelli, first published in 1945, E. H. Gombrich would make a more general point about the problem of reading physiognomies, the 'ambiguous language' of pictorial expression, difficult at the best of times, and in Botticelli's case, where we seem to lack fundamental guidance to his formulae, especially so. In a famous footnote, he cited fifteen different ways in which the facial expression of the Venus in *The Birth of Venus* had been read, across a broad emotional spectrum.⁽³⁵⁾ It is a reminder of the curious ways in which the interpretation of Botticelli has offered a key set of Art Historical conundrums to be solved as methodological first principles.⁽³⁶⁾ Symonds had suggested that Pater was not mistaken in his reading of these facial expressions in themselves; rather, that Botticelli himself had simply not been able to paint the 'more subtle mood' intended. That, too, was a problematic observation. Partly, the problem is to do with the nature of melancholy. Not only is it a concept that is conceived in different ways and with new vocabularies at different historical moments, but in the classic Freudian sense, melancholy is the condition that outlives its singular causes; the melancholic subject either has no nameable object-loss or is unconscious of what that loss may be. It is 'a passion and an energy greater than any known issue ... explains'. Melancholy is therefore always ineffable. The representation of melancholy may be doubly opaque, then, liable in its freedom from reference to suggest multiple sources. This would be another way of saying that images of melancholy are especially autonomous examples of the autonomy of images.

Herbert Horne, whose 1908 study of Botticelli was dedicated to Pater, would claim to see the same expression in the faces of the Virgins, but he ascribed it to a different cause entirely. This was not an

expression of indifference to God and to His enemies, Horne thought, but the ‘melancholy and lassitude which follows upon great passion.’ He quoted from *The Song of Solomon* 2:5: “Fulcite me floribus, stipate me malis, quia amore langueo” (‘Stay me up with flowers, compass me about with apples: because I languish with love.’: ‘*langueo*’ suggesting faintness or weariness).⁽³⁷⁾ Arthur Symonds would speak oxymoronically of ‘the pensive unconcern’ in the Virgin’s face, an expression ‘chosen for its melancholy grace’.⁽³⁸⁾ Although perhaps not quite as wide as the space for interpretation ridiculed by Gombrich in readings of the Venus, nevertheless, a spectrum of emotion has also been read into Botticelli’s Madonnas. At one end there is awe, tranquillity, resignation, shading into the languor or lassitude that follows transcendental joys, perhaps then a sadness, melancholy, almost a peevishness or discontentment, at last a weariness, unconcern and indifference. I present it in this way as a temporal sequence because the expression always invites a narrative, but the sequence could be reversed, re-sequenced, or frozen at any point. There is nothing in the expression *in itself* that confines us to a single point on the spectrum. Pater consciously refuses to engage with the limited and conventional meanings of historical scholarship that would do so. He allows the fundamental ambiguity of facial expression to stand as the primary datum.

‘What is strangest’, Pater wrote, ‘is that [Botticelli] carries this sentiment into classical subjects, its most complete expression being a picture in the *Uffizi*, of Venus rising from the sea’. That observation was not a new one about *The Birth of Venus*, but since Pater has redefined the origin of the sentiment, it allows him to speculate in an original and fascinating way as to the reasons why the figure of Venus may (like the Virgin) be dissatisfied with the mythological persona she is required to play. ‘Men go forth to their labours until the evening’, Pater writes; ‘but she is awake before them, and you might think that the sorrow in her face was at the thought of the whole long day of love yet to come’. What is most striking is ‘the sadness with which [Botticelli] has conceived the goddess of pleasure as the depository of a great power over the lives of men’.⁽³⁹⁾ A satiated or languorous Venus is not a new idea either, but Pater’s sense of her sorrow and its source is. The emotional tenor of this particular connection – between sexual knowledge and self-alienation – is a note heard throughout the literature of the *fin de siècle*, in French Symbolism, and in the early poetry of Pound and Eliot. Like Eliot’s

Tiresias, Venus has foresuffered all; she is resigned to go through the eternal recurrence, to endure the long day of love ahead.⁽⁴⁰⁾ But the point is that her sadness seems to derive precisely from having been born again. It suggests the anxiety that comes with the cultural belatedness of her revival – a general anxiety with the burden of historical myth. Symonds objected that this was to have completely missed the original spirit of the goddess as life-giving, the Venus Genetrix of Lucretius, who may have provided the primary literary source, which is why resignation was the wrong sentiment to attribute to her. But this is what Pater takes to be Botticelli's meaning: brought back to life in order to live it all over again, foreseeing what her role is, *this* Venus is pale with sorrow.

We are dealing with two dimensions of recurrence which are intersecting in Pater's essay: the recurrence of the type, and the cultural re-birth of classical mythology. The idea of a recurring female type – whether that of a general and idealised Florentine 'school', or of a portrait of a specific person – had, as I say, long been recognised as a truth about these paintings. Rio's *De L'Art Chrétien* had observed that it was impossible for a visitor to the Uffizi gallery not to be struck, in fact, by the resemblance between three specific types in Botticelli's oeuvre; that was, between that of the Virgin, of Venus, and of Truth (the last being the naked figure of 'Truth' on the far left side of *The Calumny of Apelles*).⁽⁴¹⁾ Not everyone has agreed, however, about exactly which faces are the same, and which may be portraits of Simonetta. If she appears as the model for Venus in *The Birth of Venus*, perhaps the same figure is Flora in *La Primavera*, where she seems to have aged. With slight variations, the same face appears as each of the three Graces. She has been identified as the principal female figure in the *Mars and Venus* and in *Pallas and the Centaur*. A recurring model (the same perhaps) appears as the *Madonna of the Magnificat*, the *Madonna of the Cestello Annunciation*, the *Madonna of the Pomegranate*; but she is also 'Abundance' in the drawing from the British Museum. She is the naked 'Truth' in *The Calumny of Apelles*, but also models the personifications of 'Calumny' herself. Ruskin and Tyrwhitt both saw her in the Moses frescoes in the Sistine Chapel as the figure of Zipporah, a photograph of whom Charles Swann kept on his study table because she reminded him of Odette.⁽⁴²⁾

There are different understandings of the word 'type' that ought to be distinguished, too, even when, as here, they fold into one another. The first is the sense in which the word is used to denote the

typological (the Virgin is the type of the Church, or Venus is a type of the Virgin). Arguably the point of most fascination about Botticelli's work has been the precise meanings of the iconographical types in his mythological paintings. The second is the sense in which the word denotes a type of feminine beauty, an ideal or reiterated model. In Renaissance portraiture there are complex relations between the notion of ideal feminine beauty and portraits of particular persons. And the idea that a particular feminine ideal is modelled on the beloved of the painter is often a part of this complexity.⁽⁴³⁾

Swinburne was the first English observer to connect the 'somewhat lean and fleshless beauty' of Botticelli's females with bodily illness and to attribute this to something other than her part as the mother of Christ. She was, he wrote, 'worn down, it seems, by some sickness or natural trouble rather than by ascetic or artificial sorrow' ('artificial' is a thrust at Christian piety). He, too, took for granted that the 'thin-faced' girl with 'small sharp features, bright intent eyes, and rippling hair' in *The Birth of Venus* was based on Simonetta, and that she had been 'dear' to Botticelli.⁽⁴⁴⁾ For Pater, also, the type seemed to conform to 'no acknowledged or obvious type of beauty', although this was not in fact true. The long and slender neck, pale oval face, sandy-golden hair, constituted a type of beauty much admired in fifteenth-century Florence.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Does the fact that there is a generic type of ideal femininity in both pagan and Christian roles reinforce the first dimension of typological substitution, or is it merely a consequence of 'school' painting? Finally, there is a further complexity in the idea (which again may rely on a mixture of truth and error) that there exist actual portraits of Simonetta Vespucci, either by tradition or by legend, works that have been associated in one way or another with her name.⁽⁴⁶⁾

Aldolfo Venturi in 1892, and Aby Warburg in 1893, each suggested that Botticelli painted Simonetta in *La Primavera* as she had appeared in Poliziano's *Stanze*, recording the 1475 Florentine joust.⁽⁴⁷⁾ By this point in the century appreciation of Botticelli had reached the level where it invited the ridicule of *Punch* magazine and Gilbert and Sullivan.⁽⁴⁸⁾ The relative depthlessness of the pictures, the energy of outline and contour (Ruskin had described him as the greatest 'Delineator' in the history of art); the skill in depicting arrested dance-like movements; even the idea of an emotional detachment, could be interpreted as the doubles of a *fin de siècle* aesthetic, certainly of a coming

Modernist one.⁽⁴⁹⁾ The wan-faced, cloned female in the paintings of Burne-Jones, who greatly admired the artist, seemed to be in a direct line of influence. George Moore's *Modern Painting* (1893) culminated in chapter entitled 'Long Ago in Italy', which was able to claim for the Florentine artists of the fifteenth century that 'beauty for beauty's sake' had been 'the first article of their faith'. Describing Botticelli's *Madonna and Child with St. John the Baptist*, Moore incorporated the rhythms of Pater's prose into his own sense – not of the Virgin's melancholy, but of her ecstasy:

Never was a head designed with more genius than that strange Virgin, ecstatic, mysterious, sphinx-like; with half-closed eyes, she bends her face to meet her God's kiss. In this picture Botticelli sought to realise the awfulness of the Christian mystery: the Mother leans to the kiss of her Son—her Son, who is likewise her God, and her brain is dim with its ecstasy. She is perturbed and overcome; the kiss is in her brain, and it trembles on her lips.⁽⁵⁰⁾

'[And] her choice is on her face'. '...and the eyelids are a little weary'. '...and keeps their fallen day about her'. The cadence recurs, like the type, and is echoed in many nineteenth-century prose *ekphrases* after Pater.⁽⁵¹⁾

In the first part of the twentieth century the story of Simonetta Vespucci's presence in these pictures came under suspicion. Herbert Horne outlined what he called the 'fantastic medley of misconceptions' which had led to the identification of the type with Simonetta and attempted to dismiss the story, which he traced back to Tyrhitt's note to Ruskin's lecture.⁽⁵²⁾ Gombrich was similarly suspicious of what he called 'the romantic approach to the past' upon which this identification had been made.⁽⁵³⁾ It seemed in the ensuing decades that the story would retreat to the realm of popular fancy and to the 'fog of myth'.⁽⁵⁴⁾ The rehabilitation of the myth, or of that part of it at least which relates to a real historical person, and the case for its basis in truth, has been presented more recently by Charles Dempsey in two influential studies of the Humanist culture of the circles of Lorenzo the Magnificent.⁽⁵⁵⁾ Dempsey's argument is based around the idea of Simonetta as 'a real person with historical existence' who is also 'the embodiment of a poetic fiction' (in similar ways to Dante's Beatrice and Petrarch's Laura). As such she is embedded within the traditions of vernacular

love poetry revived by Poliziano and others, under the encouragement and with the participation of Lorenzo de' Medici.⁽⁵⁶⁾ Following the rules and conventions of this tradition her renowned beauty and early death were the cues for a mythologizing process, which produced a powerful poetic fiction rooted in the actuality of her historical existence, in 'things Botticelli had actually seen and experienced'.⁽⁵⁷⁾ Her story, then, is an example of the complex interpenetration of private and personal spheres with public myths and celebrations in *quattrocento* Florentine culture. A poeticized Particular (a real woman) stands for a manifested Universal (Love, or Truth, or *Humanitas*). It was a habit of thought very close to Pater's own: a reciprocal embodying and vivifying between persons and impersonal forces or concepts. Gombrich's work on the Neo-Platonist circles of Lorenzo's Florence had placed an emphasis on notions of the concrete bodying forth of abstract notions, particularly in the thought of Marsilio Ficino.⁽⁵⁸⁾ It was Gombrich's idea, too, that the critics who grasped the affinity between Botticelli's Venus and his Madonnas were right to do so because Botticelli's major achievement had been the ability to paint non-religious or mythological themes with the passion hitherto associated with religious subjects. The artist had been able to do this because of his immersion in Neo-Platonist culture, which had 'succeeded in opening up to secular art the emotional spheres which had hitherto been in the preserve of religious worship'.⁽⁵⁹⁾

To this, an obvious question presents itself: and *vice versa*? For Pater, the quality of 'indifference' (imperturbability, serenity, detachment) was a supreme virtue of the art of antiquity, particularly that of classical sculpture (in the terms disseminated by Winckelmann). It was an ethical virtue as much as an aesthetic one, and so would be connected, for him, with the neutrality or refusal to take sides evinced by the rebel angels of whom Dante and Palmieri had written. Indifference could itself be a conviction, a passion even. The chapter on Winckelmann in *Studies* quotes a passage from Lavater's *Essai sur la physiognomie* (1783) proposing that 'ardour and indifference' are by no means 'incompatible in the same character', one of many such assertions in Pater's writing.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Pater would characterise the emotional sphere of pagan art not merely as one of a sensuous eroticism, then, but also as one of passionate renunciation, of great refusals. He would trace the same spirit of asceticism in the pre-Socratic philosophers. If Botticelli's angels were displaced or in exile, they also implicitly

suggested the exiled or wandering spiritual forces of the ancient world, reanimated in the fifteenth century. Pater would write several fables of such displacement and reanimation, partly influenced by Heine's *The Gods in Exile*, a long extract from which is quoted in *Studies*. In other words, the exchange works both ways, so that the emotional sphere of pagan art (as understood by Pater) would also, naturally, touch the issues of Christian painting. In the early writings of Ruskin precisely this contiguity had been at the root of what he called the Renaissance 'poison-tree'.⁽⁶¹⁾

Pater certainly made the connection not only between the recurring instances of the type, but with the name of Simonetta:

He paints the story of the goddess of pleasure in other episodes besides that of her birth from the sea, but never without some shadow of death in the grey flesh and wan flowers. He paints Madonnas, but they shrink from the pressure of the divine child, and plead in unmistakable undertones for a warmer, lower humanity. The same figure – tradition connects it with Simonetta, the mistress of Giuliano de' Medici – appears again as Judith returning home across the hill country when the great deed is over, and the moment of revulsion come, and the olive branch in her hand is becoming a burthen; as Justice, sitting on a throne, but with a fixed look of self-hatred which makes the sword in her hand seem that of a suicide; and again as Veritas in the allegorical picture of Calumnia, where one may note in passing the suggestiveness of an accident which identifies the image of Truth with the person of Venus.⁽⁶²⁾

It is a brief but, I think, crucial acknowledgement because it allows the recurrence of the type to take on a personalised form in Simonetta, and this helps reinforce the idea of a recurring act of resistance to the generic role being played by a female figure. The sorrow of Venus at the 'thought of the long day of love yet to come', the shrinking of the Madonna from the divine child, the revulsion of Judith and the self-hatred of 'Justice': those repeated moments of alienation from type reflect what Symonds would describe as the nineteenth century's 'delight in the delicately poised psychological problems of the middle Renaissance', and (he might have added) the assumption that the question really *is*

primarily a psychological problem: in this case, one of sorrow, resistance, or self-hatred.⁽⁶³⁾

Simonetta's name makes the psychological dimension more credible by making it personal, an effect further reinforced by the association with the power of the Medici family. Conceived as such it is consistent with a fundamental instinct in Pater's writing to think in terms of persons. His principal epistemological analogy is with the knowledge of persons. Historical ideas, philosophical systems, take their true form and are only comprehended through the individuals in whom they are manifested, which means that they are inextricable from certain biases of temperament, sometimes from afflictions of personality or psychosomatic maladies. But their force in the world is discovered through the drama they enact in and between persons. The personification of natural forces and of environmental factors is the fundamental mode of ancient myth. 'Personality' is a word made to work notoriously hard in *Studies*, where it is conceived in terms of structural laws and inner moods, the awakening of which produces artworks. As such it is understood to be the basis of style, and an example of that vital aesthetic quality of *intimité*. Artworks have the capacity to move us as personalities do in life. The conscience is outwardly embodied in other persons, but also experienced as a conversation with a person inhabiting the most intimate and sovereign dimension of the self. To treat the psychological dilemma of the central Renaissance in terms of the troubles of a particular person, then, is entirely characteristic of Pater's thought.

Pater's originality in the essay on Botticelli is to place this psychological dilemma in open opposition both to paganism and to Christianity. The first principle and most durable myth (or half-truth) of the Italian Renaissance as it was understood in the nineteenth century was that the major project of that period had been an effort to reconcile and harmonise pagan antiquity with Christianity. In the chapter on 'Pico Della Mirandola' in *Studies*, Pater would trace with some sympathy this 'vain hope' as it developed in the fifteenth century, 'the first necessity' of which, he says, was 'to misrepresent the language, the conceptions, the sentiments, it was proposed to compare and reconcile'.⁽⁶⁴⁾ Ruskin, of course, rejected the project outright – or rather, he insisted that it had been a catastrophe from the beginning, but not because he believed reconciliation was in itself an impossibility. His later works especially offer remarkable readings of the allegorical and typological

syntheses between pagan antiquity and Christianity, and he would come to think of Botticelli as the pre-eminent artist of such efforts to unite apparently incongruous elements. For Ruskin, Botticelli had been ‘the only painter of Italy who thoroughly felt and understood Dante; and the only one who understood the thoughts of Heathens and Christians equally, and could in a measure paint both Aphrodite and the Madonna’.⁽⁶⁵⁾ For this he belonged among the chief ‘southern Reformers’, with Dante and Savonarola. (Ruskin pointed out that in the Sistine frescoes depicting the life of Moses, Botticelli had painted the devil in a monk’s cowl tempting Christ, ‘the sauciest thing, out and out, done in the Renaissance’.)⁽⁶⁶⁾ As Pater had before him, Ruskin took up the suggestion that there may have been something unorthodox or risky in Botticelli’s paintings, but he anchored the sentiment in a reforming zeal consistent with someone who would become a *piagnone* under the influence of Savonarola, and who would illustrate and comment upon *La Commedia*. If we want to think of Pater’s idea of the Madonna as essentially a Protestant reimagining, a refusal to worship the divine mother, then there is a certain affinity with Ruskin’s reading. But really the differences are more significant than the similarities. ‘The learned men of [Botticelli’s] age in general brought back the Greek mythology as anti-Christian’, wrote Ruskin. ‘But Botticelli and Perugino, as pre-Christian; nor only as pre-Christian, but as the foundation of Christianity. But chiefly Botticelli, with perfect grasp of the Mosaic and classic theology, thought over and seized the harmonies of both’.⁽⁶⁷⁾ Pater differed fundamentally from Ruskin in thinking of the harmony or unity of Botticelli’s pictures not as a reconciliation of differences (and for Ruskin this was one in which paganism is the handmaid to Christianity); but instead, as a kind of neutralizing of them. This refusal to choose between two incongruous entities maintained their incongruity and was based upon an emotional indifference to the question of precedence in the Mosaic and the classical theology alike. And this indifference would be pictured or dramatized as a sequence of female personae in which was repeated the same singular psychological dilemma.

When Symonds came to address the question of Botticelli’s relationship with the old mythologies, he included a footnote quoting a friend who had asked himself (as if resisting a temptation to vice) what, exactly, he found so fascinating about Botticelli’s pictures. “I am forced to admit”, the friend

had written, ““that it is the touch of paganism in him, the fairy-story element, *the echo of a beautiful lapsed mythology which he has found the means of transmitting.*”” [Symonds’ italics.](⁶⁸) Pater’s feelings about Christianity would change and become more complex during the course of his life, but in 1870 he certainly thought of the religion as something like a ‘beautiful lapsed mythology’. For him, this was the primary sense in which the pagan and the Christian were undifferentiated.

What might be claimed now, after one hundred and fifty years of further scholarship, after the debunking and rebunking of myths, for Pater’s reading of Botticelli? Is it nothing more than a happy or ‘creative’ anachronism, a modernist fantasy? When Pater notes the ‘strange suggestiveness of an accident which identifies the image of Truth with the person of Venus’ (since the same face seems to appear in both these roles), he is offering a rationale for the essay’s methods. For him there is no such thing as co-incidence (in this, as in some other respects, Pater anticipates Freud, whose essay on Leonardo is indebted to Pater). ‘Classical story’, Pater writes in the chapter on ‘Pico della Mirandola’, ‘was regarded as a mere datum to be received and assimilated. It did not come into men’s minds to ask curiously of science concerning its origin, its primary form and import, its meaning for those who projected it’.⁽⁶⁹⁾ Anachronism (suggestive accident) is more, then, than a simple misperception of the past; it is a basic form of memory and imagination, of reception and assimilation, and therefore of historical experience. It was a fact of public life in *quattrocento* Florence (in a complex way it underlies the joust of 1475); and of course the concept underpins any understanding of cultural re-birth or renaissance. Florence had been a place in which the works of the classical Latin and Greek writers were among ‘the modern literature of Europe’, and figures such as Poliziano would pride themselves upon speaking a Latin more perfect than that spoken in ancient Rome.⁽⁷⁰⁾ For Ruskin, Botticelli had been a ‘Greek reanimate... more purely Greek in spirit than the Apollo Belvedere’.⁽⁷¹⁾ This was because the sculptor of the Apollo had ceased to believe in the reality of the myth he was illustrating, and had therefore taken the occasion merely to show off his skill as a craftsman. Botticelli, however, had received the newly recovered classical learning ‘as a child in later years recovers the forgotten dearness of a nursery tale; and is more himself, and again and again himself, as he breathes the air of Greece, and hears, in his own Italy, the lost voice of the Sibyl murmur again by

the Avernus Lake'.⁽⁷²⁾ The inoculation of Christianity with classical mythology brought a powerful new unity in the Southern reformers. The 'Florentine Greeks reanimate', as Ruskin called them, were 'human more strongly, more deeply' because upon them we see 'at once the joy of resurrection, and the solemnity of the grave'.⁽⁷³⁾

What is perhaps the most striking thing of all in nineteenth-century writings about fifteenth-century Florence is the desire to believe in *some* form of renaissance. For Pater, the Greekness of Botticelli was equally powerful, not because it merged with Christian theology, but because it represented a rebirth of an original purity. *The Birth of Venus* was 'a more direct inlet into the Greek temper than the works of the Greeks themselves even of the finest period'. And this was because it recorded the first impressions of the spirit of Greek antiquity upon the intellects of men who had 'turned back towards it in almost painful aspiration from a world in which it had been ignored so long'.⁽⁷⁴⁾ In other words, the conventional historical opposition of innocence (the past) versus experience (the future) has been reversed. The pure Greek temper was reborn in the mind of the Florentine Humanists as they looked back, surprised like children at the startling new phenomenon; Venus herself (psychologised and autonomous) emerges to meet them like a ghostly revenant, full of the sadness of experience and the burden of foreknowledge. Margaret Oliphant derided that upside-down way of thinking about antiquity. For her, Pater's study of the Renaissance showed 'what Greek – not the language but the tone of mind and condition of thought, taken up a thousand years or so too late, on the top of a long heritage of other thoughts and conditions – may bring Oxford to.'⁽⁷⁵⁾

But as a form of historical understanding, Pater's 'fantastic modernism' reaches far beyond philhellenic Oxford. It is an occult methodology that would influence those who came after him, drawing upon the illegitimate modes of writing about history which it observes in the fifteenth century – 'that fancy of the reminiscence of a forgotten knowledge', 'divination, clairvoyance', déjà vu, the concept of metempsychosis.⁽⁷⁶⁾ A thousand year gap is the precondition for historical understanding of the kind Pater thinks valuable. As fantasy, it has a curious tendency to produce shapes and outlines that acquire intelligibility. The pre-echoes of Modernist literature in Pater's writings are everywhere and have often been observed (I have offered a few examples here), but he also seems in some

uncanny way to foresee a later condition (or 'complex', to borrow Pound's word), in which the sorrow and alienation of belatedness would become acute. Both La Bella Simonetta and the Mona Lisa had acquired mythic status before the close of the nineteenth century, and yet Pater sums up something about to happen to them in the twentieth, the afterlife that is awaiting the face of Simonetta Vespucci, and the particular form of aura-celebrity to mask the face of the Mona Lisa. Simonetta's fetishized, alienated face appealed to Warhol just as Marilyn Monroe's would, to be repeated and repeated, neutralised first, and then transfigured or made beautiful again. Warhol's silkscreen prints of Botticelli's Venus in 'Pop' colours offer an aesthetic of passionate impersonality, of ardour and indifference fused together. The next stage would seem to be, as with the demonic angels, a cooling off completely. Now Simonetta looks at us from the commercial objects of key-rings and aprons; she is printed in polyester and cotton and plastic, on trousers and t-shirts, skirts and ties. The museum age of secular merchandising seems to offer a fulfilment of Pater's intuition of exile and displacement. In this context her weariness and indifference are perfectly understandable. Artists restage her appearances, make her over as kitsch; they underline the sexual dysfunction at which Pater had only hinted.⁽⁷⁷⁾

Pater's Botticelli might seem like a pivotal text in this secularisation narrative. This, too, strikes me as a form of anachronism, and finally a less interesting one than his own. The afterlife of Simonetta in the age of blockbuster exhibitions, and the fate of impersonality she seems destined to have fulfilled, is, I would suggest, only dimly connected to the misreading in Pater's essay. Even though she exemplifies the autonomous life of images (of ambiguous physiognomies particularly), Walter Pater's Simonetta is in a real relationship to the myths in which she takes her role. Her presence as a counter-type produces ways of thinking about Christian and pagan myths which are subtly dissonant, in some ways subversive, but also very simply generative. Anachronism as Pater practices it is productive in this way: a method of new combinations. The Madonna of Indifference, the Venus troubled by the long day of love ahead, the self-hatred of Justice, are new figures in the world. We recognise them as having somehow always been possible. Then they are plausible, believable, and in being so they interpret the myths in which they live. They have the effect Eliot said a new work of art had upon

previous works; what has gone before is subtly altered by their presence.⁽⁷⁸⁾ (The logic of anachronism in Eliot's argument is often overlooked.) The essay on Botticelli does not, then, move towards impersonality – quite the opposite in fact, since it is conceived through the relation of two very real persons. There is the idea of a peculiar 'mood' or 'sentiment' woken in Botticelli as a kind of structural law of his personality as an artist; and there is the notion that this personal sentiment is clothed in the sensuous and visible circumstance of an original historical personage, the lady Simonetta, repeatedly traced in the artist's pictures.

ENDNOTES:

1] 'Theoretikos' ('The Contemplative'), *The Works of Oscar Wilde* (Leicester: Gallery Press, 1987), p.700, ll.12-14.

2] See the entry on Tyrwhitt in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27956?docPos=1> Ruskin would provide a preface to Tyrwhitt's *Christian Art and Symbolism* (1872).

3] John Ruskin, *Ariadne Florentina* (1873-76) in *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols. (London: Allen; New York: Longmans, Green, 1903-12), XXII, p.483. [Hereafter, *WJR*.] Simonetta had in fact died two years before Giuliano, both on the 26th April. Tyrwhitt asks: 'Can Simonetta be traced in any of [Botticelli's Madonnas]? I think not.' (p. 484.)

4] See, especially, the two studies by Charles Dempsey: *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), and *The Early Renaissance and Vernacular Culture* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012); and also Monika Schmitter, 'Botticelli's Images of Simonetta Vespucci: Between Portrait and Ideal', *Rutger's Art Review* 15 (1995), pp.33-54.

5] *WJR*, XXII, pp.483-484.

6] *WJR*, XXII, p.484. “All decent men accustomed to draw from the nude tell us they get to that.”
(p.484.)

7] Tyrwhitt saw lust as the corruption of the very best faculty in man (love) into the very worst:
“Corruptio optimi pessima; and it is the most searching and lasting of evils, because it really is a corruption attendant on true Love, which is eternal – whatever the word means. Then, its connection with female beauty, as a cause of love between man and woman, seems to me to be the inextricable nodus of the Fall, the here inseparable mixture of good and evil, till soul and body are parted. For the sense of seen Beauty is the awakening of Love, at whatever distance from any kind of return or sympathy – as with a rose, or what not. Sandro may be the man who has gone nearest to the right separation of delight from desire: supposing that he began with religion and a straight conscience; saw lovingly the error of Fra Filippo’s ways; saw with intense distant love the error of Simonetta’s; and reflected on Florence and *its* way, and drew nearer and nearer to Savonarola, being yet too big a man for asceticism; and finally wearied of all things and sunk into poverty and peace.” *WJR*, XXII, pp.484-485. ‘Corruptio optimi pessima’ was an important notion in Ruskin’s thinking too.

8] See Gail S. Weinberg, ‘Ruskin, Pater, and the Rediscovery of Botticelli’, *The Burlington Magazine* vol.129, 1006 (Jan, 1987), pp. 25-27. (p.26). Weinberg is quoting from a letter Ruskin wrote to Tyrwhitt, 19th September 1872. Weinberg provides conclusive evidence that Ruskin read Pater’s 1870 essay on Botticelli (and admired the work) before he wrote and published his own reassessments of the painter in the early 1870s, so that his later claim that he himself alone had been responsible for the revival of Botticelli’s reputation is not strictly true.

9] This was Margaret Oliphant’s review in *Blackwood’s Magazine* CXIV (November, 1873), pp.604-609 (p.606). See *Walter Pater: The Critical Heritage* ed. R.M. Seiler (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), pp.85-91.

10] Walter Pater, ‘Sandro Botticelli’, in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* ed. Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). This is the 1873 edition of Pater’s text, which I

will follow throughout [hereafter *Studies*]. The revised 1893 text would have ‘some subtle law of his own structure’, and ‘visible circumstance’. *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. Donald Hill (Berkeley: University of Los Angeles Press, 1980), p. 41-42. Hill’s note interprets the statement about usurping the data as an assertion of the autonomy of the artist’s vision, and points out that it was the kind of claim often made by figures such as Baudelaire and Gautier in the 1830s and 40s. (p.336.)

11] John Addington Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, vol.3, *The Fine Arts* (London: Smith & Elder, 1899), p.181.

12] *Studies*, p.40.

13] ‘Stimmung’ in the German of Kant, although perhaps the most significant theoretical approach is provided by Nietzsche in an early essay ‘On Moods’. See Stanley Corngold, ‘Nietzsche’s Moods’, *Studies in Romanticism* 29:1 (Spring, 1990), pp.67-90.

14] *Studies*, p.31.

15] ‘[A] halo of parallel rays crowns the head, and a luminous star marks the breast of every saint and angel in the *Assumption* – a uniformity of attributes which does seem to complement Palmieri’s heretical tenet, of which Botticini, illustrator of the poem, cannot have been unaware; indeed this detail seems hard to explain except as a veiled reference to the angelic origin of the soul.’ Rolf Bagemihl, ‘Francesco Botticini’s Palmieri Altar-Piece’, *The Burlington Magazine* Vol.138 No.1118 (May, 1996), pp.308-314 (p.311). Pater was relying on Rio for the Palmieri connection and on the article on Palmieri in the *Nouvelle biographie générale*. Vasari records a story that Botticelli, ‘as a jest’, had accused a friend of the heresy ‘held by the Epicureans that the soul dies with the body’. Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 4 vols. Volume III, trans. A.B. Hinds (London: Dent, 1963), p.89.

16] See *Inferno*, III, 45-51. *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, trans. John D. Sinclair (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), p.48

17] This is Sinclair's note, p.49. Dante is describing the 'great refusal' ('il gran rifiuto'), probably that made by Pope Celestine V, who resigned the Papacy in 1294.

18] T.S. Eliot, 'The Burial of the Dead', *The Waste Land*, *T.S. Eliot: Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1969), p.62. . [In Dante's original: 'ch'io non averei creduto / che morte tanta n'avesse disfatta.' (III.56-7.)]

19] W.B. Yeats, 'The Second Coming', *W.B. Yeats: Selected Poems*, ed. Timothy Webb (London: Penguin, 1991), p.124.

20] '[Pater] lived by standing aside, making many little refusals on the authority of the great refusal he rescued from Dante's contempt. Within the limits of decorum he consorted with adepts of difference, bohemians, homosexuals, decadents, and while he rarely transgressed, he sympathised with those who did.' Denis Donoghue, *Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), p. 318.

21] *Studies*, p.29.

22] Edmund Gosse, *Critical Kit-Kats* (London: Heinemann, 1896), p.270.

23] George Moore, *Avowals* (London: Heinemann, 1924), p.198.

24] *Studies*, p.32.

25] *Studies*, p.31-32.

26] Cited by Adrian S. Hoch, 'The Art of Alessandro Botticelli through the Eyes of Victorian Aesthetes', in John E. Law and Lene Østermark-Johansen (eds.), *Victorian and Edwardian Responses to the Italian Renaissance* (London: Ashgate, 2005), pp.55-85; (p.58). 'Botticelli's "melancholy" Madonna became a virtual trademark for this artist.' (p.58).

27] James Jackson Jarves's *Art Studies: the "Old Masters" of Italy; Painting* (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1861), p.267. Jarves had attributed the expression to 'a pensive misgiving at the bottom of [Botticelli's] soul as to his own manner of life'. (p.267).

28] J.A. Crowe and G.B. Cavalcaselle, *A History of Painting in Italy* (London, John Murray, 1911-14) 6 vols., 'Florentine Masters of the Fifteenth Century', vol.4, p.250.

29] *Studies*, pp.32-33.

30] Ezra Pound, 'A Few Don'ts By An Imagiste', from *Poetry* (March 1913), in *Imagist Poetry*, ed. Peter Jones (London: Penguin, 1972), p.130. Pound said he was using the word 'complex' in the 'technical sense employed by the newer psychologists' (p.130). Pater's melancholy complex seems to anticipate this development.

31] *Walter Pater: The Critical Heritage*, p.88-89. 'From no particular picture Pater evokes a Madonna with the dilemmas of a don in North Oxford in 1870, one who can see no solution but to be uncommitted'. Michael Levy, 'Botticelli and Nineteenth-Century England', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* XXIII, 3:4 (Jul- Dec 1960), pp.291-306 (p.302).

32] Symonds' review of *Studies* in *The Academy*, IV, 15 March 1873, pp.103-105. See *Walter Pater: The Critical Heritage*, pp.57-61.

33] *Walter Pater: the Critical heritage*, p.59

34] Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, III, p.185.

35] E. H. Gombrich, *Gombrich on the Renaissance: II: Symbolic Images* (London: Phaidon, 1972), p.39. The chapter 'Botticelli's Mythologies: A Study in the Neo-Platonic Symbolism of his Circle' is a revised version of the paper which first appeared in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* in 1945.

36] The problem of reading facial expression is one example, but also: the question of literary sources; of the 'lifelikeness' of real persons when placed in religious paintings; of the intersection of the private and public spheres, etc.

37] Herbert P. Horne, *Botticelli: Painter of Florence* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp.122-123. [Originally published as *Alessandro Filipepi, Commonly Called Sandro Botticelli, Painter of Florence* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1908).]

38] ‘Whether he paints the Birth of Venus or of Christ, he has the same pure curiosity and indifference: each to him is a picture and nothing more than a picture. The pensive unconcern in the Virgin’s face is an expression chosen for its melancholy grace and wistful charm. And this picture is created by one who gave his genius equally, it might be, to Venus rising out of the waves, and to the Virgin enthroned and indifferent among indifferent angels.’ Arthur Symons, *A Study of Walter Pater* (London: Charles J. Sawyer, 1932), pp.22-23.

39] *Studies*, pp.33-34.

40] ‘Pater’s “description” of the *Madonna del Magnificat* suggests his sympathy not only with homosexual desire, but also with the position of women in Greece and later, especially as sexual scapegoats.’ Paul Tucker, ““Re-animate Greek”: Pater and Ruskin on Botticelli”, Laurel Brake, Lesley Higgins, Carolyn Williams (eds.), *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire* (Greensboro, NC.: ELT Press, 2002), pp.119-132; (p.125). ‘In Botticelli, draughtsman and student though he was, the modern, the medieval, that part which had arisen in the Middle Ages, invariably had the upper hand; his Venus, despite her forms studied from the antique and her gesture imitated from some earlier discovered copy of the Medicean Venus, has the woebegone prudery of a Madonna or an abbess; she shivers physically and morally in her unaccustomed nakedness’. Vernon Lee, *Euphorion: Being Studies of the Antique and the Medieval in The Renaissance* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1884), p.185.

41] (‘[Ne] soit pas frappé de la ressemblance qui existe entre les trois types qu’il a successivement sous les yeux ... celui de la Vierge, celui de Vénus et celui de la Verité’). Cited in Hoch, p.58.

42] Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, I: ‘Swann’s Way’, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (revised by D.J. Enright), (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992). ‘When he had sat for a long time gazing at the Botticelli, he would think of his own living Botticelli, who seemed even

lovelier still, and as he drew towards him the photograph of Zipporah he would imagine that he was holding Odette against his heart'. (p.270).

43] For a general discussion of the issues, see Elizabeth Cropper, 'The Beauty of Women: Problems in the Rhetoric of Renaissance Portraiture', in Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan and Nancy J. Vickers (eds.), *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp.175-190.

44] 'Notes on Designs of the Old Masters at Florence', *Fortnightly Review*, n.s. 4 (July 1868), pp.16-40 (p.23).

45] See Ronald Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, 2 vols., vol. I: 'Life and Work' (London: Paul Elek, 1978), p.75.

46] See Dempsey and Schmitter.

47] See Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love*, pp.118-119 for a history of the myth, its debunking, and an argument for its reinstatement. Dempsey points out that the dress worn by Flora in *La Primavera* seems identical to the one Poliziano describes in the *Stanze* as worn by Simonetta in the joust of 1475. (*The Portrayal of Love*, p.123.)

48] See Levy, 'Botticelli in Nineteenth-Century England', p.304.

49] John Ruskin, *The Aesthetic and Mathematic Schools of Art in Florence* (1874), in *WJR*, XXIII, p.265. The point is made by Horne: 'No wonder then that those "circular pictures, into which the attendant angels depress their heads so naively," those "peevish-looking Madonnas" who conform "to no obvious or acknowledged type of beauty," – the school-pictures, in short, in which the imitators of Botticelli exaggerate his mannerisms, in the attempt to reproduce that peculiar sentiment which is inseparable from his personality and art, should have come to be regarded as the typical works of the master himself. And it was but natural that the bizarre vein of feeling, and the obvious, though very real, decorative qualities of such school-pieces, should appeal strongly to a time when an art, chiefly pre-occupied with detached ornament which had no direct relation to architecture, and with detached

sentiment which had no direct relation to actual life, - for such essentially was the art of Morris and Burne-Jones – was all the vogue.’ (p.xix.)

50] George Moore, *Modern Painting* (London: Walter Scott, 1893), p.104.

51] The second two examples are from the famous description of the ‘Mona Lisa’. *Studies*, p.70. One source is Swinburne’s ‘Notes on the Designs of the Old Master’s at Florence’: ‘They have known the causes of things, and are not too happy’. (p.23.)

52] Horne, *Botticelli*, pp.52-53.

53] Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, p.38.

54] L.D. and Helen S. Ettlinger, *Botticelli* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), p.164.

55] Charles Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli’s Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), and more recently, *The Early Renaissance and Vernacular Culture* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012). ‘The Simonetta [portrait] images situate themselves between a depiction of an actual woman and that of a kind of goddess.’ (Schmitter, p.43.)

56] Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love*, p.15.

57] Dempsey, *The Early Renaissance and Vernacular Culture*, p.110

58] Gombrich quotes a letter from Ficino to Lorenzo Il Magnifico and Bernardo Bembo: “‘virtue herself (if she can be placed before the eye) may serve much better as an exhortation than the words of men. It is useless to praise a girl in the ears of a boy, or describe her with words, if you want to arouse him to love... Point, if you can, to the fair maiden herself with your finger and no further word will be needed.’” Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, p.45.

59] Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, p.35. ‘As the artist absorbed in the idea of *Venus-Humanitas* and its inspiring call, the terms of secular art proved inadequate to express its meaning. This Venus was to

arouse in the spectator a feeling akin to religious enthusiasm, a divine *furor* kindled by beauty.’
(p.62.)

60] *Studies*, p.90.

61] The revival of Classical learning was the ‘root of the Renaissance poison-tree, which, of all others, is deepest struck’. *The Stones of Venice: II: The Sea-Stories*, *WJR*, X, p.370.

62] *Studies*, pp.34-35. This passage suggests that Tyrwhitt’s reading of Pater’s essay was not, as Dempsey has argued, a misreading at all, since Pater clearly links the figure of Venus with the figure of the Madonna and states that the ‘same figure’ appears ‘*again*’ as Judith, etc, and that this *person* historically, was Simonetta. Ronald Lightbown, speaking of the *Birth of Venus*, had insisted that it was the first surviving Renaissance picture to represent the female nude ‘for its own perfection rather than with erotic or religious overtones’. It was, he said, ‘almost impersonal’; ‘no personal allusions thread the painting’. Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, p.89

63] Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, III, p.181

64] *Studies*, p.20.

65] John Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera*, Letter XXII, 19th September 1872, ‘The Mount of Compassion’, *WJR*, XXVII, pp.371-393.

66] John Ruskin, *Ariadne Florentina* (1873-76) in *WJR*, XXII, [lectures delivered 1872], p.429.

67] *WJR*, XXII, p.440. Botticelli was, moreover, ‘the only man among all the reformers of Europe who fully knew ... the relation of Gentile to Jew... [who] knew the relations of the deliverance from earthly captivity by Moses, to the deliverance from spiritual captivity by Christ’. *The Aesthetic and Mathematic Schools of Art in Florence* (1874), in *WJR*, XXIII, pp.277-278. By 1874 Ruskin’s enthusiasm for the painter would allow him to claim that Botticelli knew all Dante knew of theology, and ‘much more’. *The Aesthetic and Mathematic Schools of Art in Florence* (1874), in *WJR*, XXIII,

p.266. '[And] he is the only unerring, unfearing, and to this day trustworthy and true preacher of the reformed doctrine of the Church of Christ.' (p.266).

68] Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy* III, p.182.

69] *Studies*, p.27.

70] Horne, *Botticelli*, p.54. For the valorising of anachronism as a way of reading the Renaissance, see especially Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010).

71] *WJR*, XXII, p.400. 'The fall of Greece was instant when her gods again became fables. The Apollo Belvidere is the work of a sculptor to whom Apollonism is entirely an elegant idea on which to exhibit his own skill'. *WJR*, XXII, p.403.

72] 'Design in the German Schools', *WJR*, XXII, p.400.

73] 'Design in the German Schools', *WJR*, XXII, p.405-406.

74] *Studies*, p.33.

75] *Walter Pater: The Critical Heritage*, p.90.

76] 'Winckelmann', *Studies*, p.95. 'The science of [the Renaissance] was all divination, clairvoyance, unsubjected to our exact modern formulas, seeking in an instant of vision to concentrate a thousand experiences.' *Studies*, p.60.

77] The artist Omar Ronda produced a series of pictures splicing together the faces of Simonetta and Marilyn for an exhibition entitled *Metamorphosis of Spring* (Florence, 2010). Ronda had noticed what he thought of as uncanny similarities between the lives of the two women: for example, Marilyn is said to have had an affair with both Bobby Kennedy and his brother the President, and many believe Simonetta to have been the mistress of both Giuliano and his more powerful brother Lorenzo de' Medici. See <http://www.intoscana.it/site/it/articolo/Omar-Ronda-Metamorfosi-di-primavera/> See also

Cindy Sherman's restaging of the painting of Judith leaving the tent of Holofernes, and David LaChapelle's kitschy *Venus and Mars*. The exhibition at the V&A Museum in London (March-July 2016) has offered further re-imaginings. Previewing the exhibition for *The Guardian*, Jonathan Jones allowed anachronism to get the better of him: '[Botticelli] is a 15th century surrealist – an artist who makes dreams utterly real. ... Clearly Botticelli was a genuinely turbulent character, a man of troubles – a modern man, in a pre-modern way. ... He is the poet of our exiled souls.'

<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/aug/27/botticelli-reimagined-exhibition-vanda-opening-berlin>

78] '[What] happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art that preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the new (the really new) work of art among them.' T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', originally published in *The Egoist* (1919), reprinted in *The Sacred Wood* (1920), *Selected Essays of T.S. Eliot* (London: Faber & Faber, 1932), p.15.